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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 001542

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM VM CH
SUBJECT: CREATIVE PUSH FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH - HR
DISSIDENTS PLAN CHINA PROTEST

REF: A. A) HANOI 1112

1B. B) HANOI 1131
1C. C) HANOI 1251

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Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Michalak for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: Dissident and former National Endowment for Democracy (NED) Fellow Le Quoc Quan informed Poloffs during an August 24 meeting that he and eight other leading human rights dissidents are planning a protest at the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi. On the surface, the purpose of the protest is to support the Vietnamese government's claim to the disputed Paracel and Spratly Islands but it appears the demonstration is in fact aimed at pushing the limits of freedom of speech and assembly. Other issues from the meeting will be covered septel. End Summary.

DISSIDENTS PLAN TO PROTEST

12. (C) On August 24, Poloffs met with attorney, former detainee and National Endowment for Democracy (NED) Fellow Le Quoc Quan at a local hotel lobby. Quan requested the meeting as a follow-up from a previous meeting held on July 11 that took place at his law office (ref. Hanoi 1251). Quan appeared to be in good health and stated that he continues to be closely monitored by plainclothes security agents stationed outside his home and place of work. He added that he was followed to the hotel and upon entering the lobby, Poloffs noticed a plainclothes security agent on his cell phone seated several feet away but in direct view of Quan during the entire meeting.

13. (C) Quan said he and eight other high-profile human rights dissidents, including Nguyen Vu Binh, Pham Hong Son and Nguyen Khac Toan met last week in an undisclosed location to discuss human rights issues and the need to press for greater reform. Quan did not give the location of the meeting, but when asked how the group was able to organize the demonstration he said the group communicates via Skype on a regular basis. He then shared a photo that was taken at the same meeting with all nine members seated together. According to Quan each dissident, most of whom are under house arrest or currently monitored, secretly left their home in the middle of the night in order to evade public security officials.

14. (C) During this meeting, the group agreed to take part in a protest in front of the Chinese Embassy to oppose the

August 10 announcement by the Chinese government to develop tourism in the Paracel and Spartly Islands as proposed by Hainan Province. On the surface, the demonstration will support the Vietnamese government's claim to the disputed islands and protest China's growing influence in the region, but the demonstration appears designed to push the limits of freedom of speech and assembly in Vietnam. When asked the date the protest would take place, Quan would only say that it would happen "very soon."

¶5. (C) Quan ended the meeting by stating that the group does not believe that they will be arrested for organizing a protest because outwardly they are supporting their own government. He added that it is important to push the bounds of freedom of speech and assembly and the group intends to do so while respecting the law. Quan stated that if security agents arrest the dissidents for taking part in a public protest that is within the rights and laws of the government, then it will prove that the Vietnamese government does not respect its own laws and proves that political reform is necessary.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Our human rights contacts seem to be finding more and more ingenious ways to bring about political reform while working within the country's legal framework. Organizing a protest that on the surface supports government policy - particularly on an issue on which nearly all Vietnamese agree such as a general suspicion of Chinese intentions in the region - is a unique way to press for freedom of speech and assembly. For high-profile dissidents to organize a public demonstration and then agree to take part in the same demonstration shows the lengths these individuals will go through to press for greater reform. It is safe to assume that Quan will be called in for further questioning after our meeting, and we will follow-up to check on his status.

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